

GEORGIAN HOTEL SAVED FROM DEVELOPERS

The WBC Southern Area Planning Committee at their special meeting on 23 April voted with a convincing majority of 8 to 1 to refuse a planning application to create 19 flats in the annex, build 3 three storey town houses in the hotel grounds and reduce the hotel from 43 to 12 rooms with corresponding reductions in hotel parking provision and green space within the hotel grounds.

This critical decision by the Planning Committee was made because the application did not comply with the following important WBC Planning Policies designed to protect against such unwarranted developments :-

LT2 - unacceptable loss of hotel accommodation (a fundamental consideration)

TCS1 - adverse impact on existing town centre

HA1, HE3 & HE5 - unacceptable harm to designated heritage assets including their settings and historic landscapes

D1 & D4 – unacceptable harm to residential amenity of neighbouring residents

D1, D4, D7, NE1, & NE2 – unacceptable loss of trees and detrimental impact on visual amenity and character of the area

CC4 & LRC1 – Failure to make satisfactory provision for open space management and maintenance and sustainable urban drainage

The Haslemere Society has raised objections to the scheme over the past 12 months in support of the above policies. Our detailed comments are available on the Society's web site.

This planning application has been made by two self described property developers (Linkedin C Vs), with little or no previous hotel management experience, to facilitate residential property development. The hotel was acquired by one of the directors in 2015, put into administration only two years later and quickly repurchased by its two current principal directors. Architects were engaged to draw up residential development plans resulting in a planning application in March 2018 promoted by the directors as a 'last chance to save The Georgian'.

It is clear that the Georgian Hotel is now not in a good state or condition which we believe is in large part due to the inexperience of the current ownership. Reference to comments by some visitors to the hotel in several on line booking agencies indicates the continuing lack of maintenance.

In reality the residential development scheme would have facilitated a substantial profit whilst denuding the hotel of 31 rooms and precious parking facilities. The reduction to only 12 rooms, to allow the residential development, will not meet the objective of providing adequate business and tourist accommodation in this gateway town to the South Downs National Park. Recent hotel room lettings even in the current run down state significantly exceed 12 rooms. The Cirrus 'pub with rooms' proposal typically requires in excess of 30 parking spaces to be viable. The proposed residential development would leave only 12 of the original 40+ spaces. Public parking facilities in the town are seriously inadequate and the Chestnut Avenue public parking area is regularly used to full capacity. The projected increase in homes and local population and other restaurant proposals will increase parking demand. The hotel must retain all its current parking spaces to be viable.

Acting in the best interests of Haslemere the eight local Councillors on the Waverley Southern Area Planning Committee rightly deemed the application to be inappropriate and non compliant with Waverley Policies and thus refused permission.

The Haslemere Society believes that if the Georgian Hotel were to be run as part of a hotel chain with economies of scale, experienced management, flexible staffing provision, IT facilities and the wherewithal to carry out a planned refurbishment it would be very successful. This and the listed hotel's prime location (commented on by many visitors) within our historic town conservation area means that it could once again become a very successful and valued asset to promote local business and best serve our local guests and visitors as part of the Haslemere Gateway to the South Downs National Park.

John Greer, Vice Chairman, The Haslemere Society & Planning Group Leader.